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By Mr. T O W N,
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— *Servatâ semper lege et ratione loquendi.* JUV.



IN the comedy of the *Frenchman in London*, which we are told was acted at *Paris* with universal applause for several nights together, there is a character of a rough *Englishman*, who is represented as quite unskilled in the graces of conversation; and his dialogue is made up of almost nothing but a repetition of the common salutation of *how do you do, how do you do?* Our nation has, indeed, been generally supposed to be of a fullen and uncommunicative disposition; while, on

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the other hand, the loquacious *French* have been allowed to possess the art of conversing beyond all other people. The *Englishman* requires to be wound up frequently, and stops as soon as he is down; but the *Frenchman* runs on in a continued alarum. Yet it must be acknowledged, that as the *English* consist of very different humours, their manner of discourse admits of great variety: but the whole *French* nation converse alike; and there is no difference in their address between a *Marquis* and a *Valet de Chambre*. We may frequently see a couple of *French* barbers accosting each other in the street, and paying their compliments with the same volubility of speech and grimace of action, as two courtiers in the *Thuilleries*.

I SHALL not attempt to lay down any particular rules for conversation, but point out such faults in the discourse and behaviour, as render the company of half mankind rather tedious than amusing. It is in vain, indeed, to look for conversation, where we might expect to find it in the greatest perfection, among persons of fashion; where it is almost annihilated by universal card-playing: insomuch that I have heard it given as a reason, why it is impossible for our present writers to succeed in the dialogue of genteel comedy, that our people of quality scarce ever meet but to game. All their discourse turns upon the odd trick and the four honours: and it is no less a maxim with the votaries of Whist than with those of *Bacchus*, that talking spoils company. Every one endeavours to make himself as agreeable to society as he can: but it often happens, that those, who most aim at shining in conversation, over-shoot their mark: and though a man succeeds, he should not (as is frequently the

the case) engross the whole talk to himself; for that destroys the very essence of conversation, which is talking together. We should try to keep up conversation like a ball bandied to and fro from one to the other, rather than seize it all to ourselves, and drive it before us like a foot-ball. We should likewise be cautious to adapt the matter of our discourse to our company; and not talk *Greek* before the ladies, or of the last new furbelow to a meeting of country justices.

THE pests and nuisances of society, which are commonly to be met with, may be ranged in the following manner. And first, the Attitudinarians and Face-makers. These accompany every word with a peculiar grimace or gesture: they assent with a shrug, and contradict with a twisting of the neck; are angry with a wry mouth, and pleased in a caper or a minuet step. They may be considered as speaking Harlequins; and their rules of eloquence are taken from the posture-master. These should be condemned to converse only in dumb shew with their own persons in the looking-glass; as also the Smirkers and Smilers, who so prettily set off their faces together with their words by a *je ne sçai quoi* between a grin and a dimple. With these we may likewise rank the affected tribe of Mimics, who are constantly taking off the peculiar tone of voice or gesture of their acquaintance: though they "imitate humanity so abominably," that (like bad painters) they are frequently forced to write the name under the picture, before we can discover any likeness.

NEXT to these, whose elocution consists chiefly in the action, we may consider the profest speakers. And first,
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of the Emphatical; who squeeze, and press, and beat down every syllable with as much vehemence, as a paviour thumps the pebbles with his rammer. These energetic orators are remarkable for the force of expression, with which they utter the particle *the* and conjunctive *and*; which they seem to hawk up with much difficulty out of their own throats, and to cram them with no less pain into the ears of their auditors. These should be suffered only to syringe (as it were) the ears of a deaf man through an hearing trumpet: and with these we may join the Whisperers or Low Speakers, who come up so close to you, that they may be said to measure noses with you, and have frequently a stinking breath. I would have these oracular gentry obliged to talk at a distance through a speaking trumpet, or apply their lips to the walls of a whispering gallery. The Wits, who will not condescend to utter any thing but a *bon mot*, and the Whistlers or Tune-hummers, who never articulate at all, may be joined very agreeably together in concert: and to these tinkling cymbals I would also add the sounding brass; the Bawler, who inquires after your health with the bellowing of a town-cryer.

THE Tatlers, whose pliable pipes are admirably adapted to the "soft parts of conversation," and sweetly "prattling out of fashion," make very pretty musick from a beautiful face and a female tongue: but from a rough manly voice and coarse features it is as harsh and dissonant as a jig from a bagpipe. The Half-Swearers, who split, and mince, and fritter their oaths into *gad's bud*, *ad's fish* and *demme*, and the Humbuggers, and those who nickname God's creatures, who call a man a cabbage, a crab, a queer cub, an odd fish, and an unaccountable

countable muslin, should never come into company without an interpreter. But I shall not tire my reader's patience by pointing out others, no less destructive of society: such as the Sensibles, who pronounce dogmatically on the most trivial points, and speak in sentences; the Wonderers, who are always *wondering* what o'clock it is, or *wondering* whether it will rain or no, or *wondering* when the moon changes; and lastly, the Silent Men, who seem afraid of opening their mouths for fear of catching cold, and literally observe the precept of the gospel, by letting their conversation be only *yea yea*, and *nay nay*.

THE rational intercourse, which is mutually kept up among men by conversing with each other, is one of our principal distinctions from brutes: and it is imagined by some philosophers, that birds and beasts (though without the power of articulation) perfectly understand one another by the sounds they utter; and that dogs, cats, &c. have each a particular language to themselves, like different nations. Thus it may be supposed, that the nightingales of *Italy* have as fine an ear for their own native wood-notes, as any *Signor* or *Signora* for an *Italian Air*; that the boars of *Westphalia* gruntle as expressively through the nose, as the inhabitants in *Highb-German*; and that the frogs in the dykes of *Holland* croak as intelligibly as the natives jabber their *Highb-Dutch*. However this may be, we may consider those, who let their tongues always vibrate as their hearts beat, and do not keep up the proper conversation of human creatures, as imitating the language of different animals. Thus, for instance, the affinity between Chatterers and Monkeys, and Praters and Parrots, is too obvious not to occur at once: Grunters

and Growlers may be justly compared to Hogs: Sparlers are Curs, that continually shew their teeth, but never bite; and the Spitfire Passionate are a sort of wild Cats, that will not bear stroaking, but will purr when they are pleased. Complainers are Screech-Owls; and Story-tellers, who are always repeating the same dull note, are Cuckows. Poets, that prick up their ears at their own hideous braying, are no better than Asses: Critics in general are venomous serpents, that delight in hissing; and some of them, who have got by heart a few technical terms without knowing their meaning, are no other than Magpies. I myself, who have crowed to the whole town for near three years past, may perhaps put my readers in mind of a Dunghill Cock: but as I must acquaint them, that they will hear the last of me on this day fortnight, I hope they will then consider me as a Swan, who is supposed to sing sweetly at his dying moments.

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